

ALTERNATIVE MEANINGS

The Washington Post has published the winning submissions to its contest in which readers are asked to supply alternative meanings for common words. This week's words:
Negligent: adj. A condition in which you absentmindedly answer the door in your nightie
Gargoyle: n. An olive-flavored mouthwash

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\$500K earmark for Loop Trail hits snag

The \$500,000 federal earmark designated for the Coon Rapids/Whiterock's Town Loop Trail has, at least for the moment, disappeared.

Rachel Garst, member of the Great Places Steering Committee, delivered the disappointing news to the Coon Rapids city council Monday night. The money has disappeared due to the fact that the federal government is operating under a continuing resolution while the President and Congress work out their differences on the appropriations bills that fund the proposed 2007 budget. Garst said the time line for the Town Loop Trail project will probably be pushed back by as much as a year.

"We've still got money to work with, but we probably won't be able to get everything done this year as we would have liked," Garst told the council.

Total cost of the Town Loop Trail, minus the paving, is estimated to cost \$921,000. Even without the \$500,000 earmark, the project still has \$250,000 in funding from the Great Places state appropriation, \$106,875 in a federal enhancement grant, and \$75,000 from a 2005 REAP grant. There's also a \$403,000 federal transportation grant pending, the status of which CR/Whiterock officials are hoping to learn by next month.

"If we get the \$403,000 grant, we will still be able to complete the infrastructure of the entire Town Loop Trail but we wouldn't have the funding to pave the trail," said Rachel's sister Liz Garst, also Great Place Steering Committee member.

Even though new leadership in Congress has expressed interest in scrutinizing the process involved in creating federal earmarks, Garst said she is hopeful the Town Loop Trail earmark will ultimately survive once the federal budget is approved. "We've got both Republican and Democrat leaders who are strong supporters of the project," she said.

The Town Loop Trail proposes to extend the current city trail south under the Highway 141 Bridge and into Whiterock Con-

servancy land. From there the trail would snake south about a mile, cross the river over an abandoned bridge, and loop back, wind through the historic Khrushchev farm house and the Garst ponds before passing underneath the highway again and ending by the revolving ear of corn sign near the south entrance of Coon Rapids. The project also includes construction of a pedestrian river bridge to provide a shorter route to the Khrushchev farm house.

"We certainly have enough money to get the trail under the highway by building an underpass," explained Garst, who said that engineering specs for this underpass are largely completed. Construction of the underpass is expected yet this year.

In regards to the 2005 REAP grant money, Garst said local officials are hoping to delay hard surfacing the new trail segment from the end of the existing trail to the highway, and using that money to work on opening up the entire Loop Trail Route. "That will take REAP committee approval," she added. "If they don't approve it, the paving will have to be completed by the end of this year or otherwise the money will be lost."

Garst said that as soon as the status of the \$403,000 grant is known, the GP Committee will schedule an appearance with the Vision Iowa board and request a Community Attraction and Tourism Grant. "We anticipate appearing before the Vision Iowa board with a joint request for funding not only the Town Loop Trail but also Streescaping and the Opening Whiterock project," continued Garst. "To get the CAT grant, we have to show a significant local investment and we have already shown that with the Whiterock land gift and the cities' agreement to TIF on the streetscape project."

DNR programs selects Raccoon River Basin for week long river cleanup

If this summer's 5th Annual Project AWARE is anything like the previous four, expect 150 to 200 volunteers in Coon Rapids on June 16-17 to begin a week-long river cleanup of the Raccoon River Watershed.

Project AWARE stands for "A Watershed Awareness River Expedition," and was created by Brian Soenen, an employee of the Department of Natural Resources. Since its first outing on the Maquoketa River in 2003, Project AWARE has brought enthusiastic volunteers to a different Iowa watershed every June.

Organizers recently announced that the 2007 edition of Project AWARE will be tackling portions of both the Middle and North Raccoon Rivers.

"It's a great honor they're coming here," said Liz Garst, a director of Whiterock Conservancy.

Soenen said one goal of Project AWARE is to concentrate on different parts of the state. This year, Soenen said the Raccoon River Basin seemed to stand out.

"There's a lot going on in the area at this time to help focus energy on the river, especially the Middle Raccoon River stretch with the Whiterock Conservancy recently having been established as an important piece for the state of Iowa."

Soenen said the Middle Raccoon will occupy the volunteers on Saturday and Sunday.

On Saturday, June 16, early arriving volunteers will clean from the Galloway Bridge north of Coon Rapids to the Highway 141 Bridge. On Sunday, the effort



will be redirected on a stretch from the Whiterock Conservancy's River House all the way to Springbrook State Park. On Monday, June 18, the group will depart to wage battle in a much larger corridor of the North Raccoon River, from McMahan Access 4 miles east of Scranton to the Des Moines Waterworks Park.

Garst said DNR officials chose the Middle Raccoon River near Coon Rapids partly due to the interest generated from smaller-scale river cleanups held here during the past two summers sponsored by the Central Iowa Paddlers' Association. Garst also credited rural Bayard resident Jerry Cook, who surveyed the river by canoe last November and using a hand held GPS unit, documented the location of significant trash and junk. "The DNR was impressed by our preparation," Garst added.

Garst is hoping there's a large contingency of local volunteers who get involved for the cleanup for at least the first two days.

"To tell you the truth, it was pretty embarrassing last year because so few local volunteers actually showed up," said Garst.

Stoffers shares game plan for replacing Hjelle

CRB school superintendent Rich Stoffers laid out his game plan for replacing long time faculty member Keith Hjelle, whose resignation was accepted by the Board of Education Monday night.

It's the second time in four years that Hjelle has resigned from the district. The 33 year veteran faculty member took advantage of the district's early retirement incentive program in 2004, then was rehired to teach World History for the past three years on a part time basis. This time, however, Hjelle is calling it quits completely.

"All good things must come to an end," wrote Hjelle in perhaps the shortest resignation letter ever accepted by the CRB school board.

Stoffers said he has been considering options on how to shuffle teaching assignments in order to make Hjelle's vacancy close to a full time position. He plans to advertise the position in late January/early February, along with the varsity head football coaching position. Stoffers said his top priority is to hire a teacher who can also coach football; someone who can build relationships with the student athletes on a daily basis all through the school year.

"I believe it is important to hire a great teacher and a great coach," said Stoffers. If this combination doesn't work out as planned, then we'll look at something else as a back up," said Stoffers, who added that unknown at this point is whether there may be any other staff resignations before the end of the current year.

In related discussion, Stoffers and the board discussed the district's Early Retirement Incentive Program for Certified and Support Staff.

Stoffers said the incentive program has been an effective downsizing tool that school officials have utilized to reduce the overall staff by more than 20% in the past 5 years. But former superintendent Dennis Wentz warned the board last year that the staff is much leaner, and continuing to utilize the program would have an negative impact on the quality of education. As a result, the district did not budget to fund

any early retirement program for 2006-07.

Since that time, Stoffers said he has been working with board secretary Gail Hopkins in review of the program to see if circumstances and district finances have changed enough to continue offering early retirement incentives this year. However following lengthy board discussion, the board took no action, and as a result, the district will not accept any applicants for the program this year.

The board approved Stoffers' recommendation to hire Deb Davis as a special education para-educator. Davis has been a temporary sub since late November assigned one on one to a special needs elementary student.

In other business, the board:

- discussed the time line for selling the Bayard school properties. Stoffers said he intends to advertise the properties for sale to the highest bidder in late January. With any luck, a deal could be completed by March.

Several board members expressed concern about getting caught between the buyers and the Bayard city council over how the property should/could be utilized. The board agreed that in advertising for bids to buy the

property, it should be made clear to the buyer that any future use for the property is to be determined by the buyer and/or the Bayard city council.

Which isn't to say the school district has to sell the property to the highest bidder, said Stoffers. If one bidder proposes to build a new residential development on the property site but another higher bidder doesn't indicate his intentions, Stoffers said the board might choose between what's best for Bayard versus what's best for the tax-paying CRB district patrons. Parceling out the property would also be an option, Stoffers said, but the 'cleanest way' is to sell it as one complete property.

Stoffers said that school attorney Rick Engel is working on the legal proceedings and verbage in order to sell the Bayard school property site, which includes the existing gymnasium. In addition, local real estate agents have offered their services to the school in appraising the property, locating abstracts, preparing appropriate advertising documents and sharing their expertise.

- Stoffers and High School Principal Shawn Zanders both noted the new scorer's table has been installed in the high school gym. Initially the school board

intended to partner with a Des Moines firm who would sell advertising on the score table as a way to pay to not only pay for the score table but also generate additional funds for the athletic department. However, after listening to concerns of local businesses, school officials decided against the partnership. As an alternative, a letter was sent to local businesses soliciting donations to pay for the scorer's table. So far the district has received donations from 17 businesses/families totaling \$4,000. The cost of the scorer's table is \$4,105. In addition, Stoffers authorized Athletic Director Kent Halstead to use excess donations to purchase an ice making machine for the Jr./Sr. High School Athletic Department. Stoffers said he still expects that donations will cover the cost of both acquisitions.

- Stoffers noted that the district's new contract with Laser Resources appears to be saving the district money. The district's billing for the first month of usage of three new copier systems totaled \$1,883.53, a net savings of \$358.53 compared to the previous contract with IKON Solutions. Stoffers said the total number of copies made at each of the three attendance centers was eye-opening:

Deal Elementary - 47,498 copies;
Intermediate - 33,407 copies;
7-12 grade - 49,320 copies.

- Stoffers also reported on the district's long-range facilities plan and the status of several improvement projects the district intends to complete this year.

A representative from Karr Tuckpointing from Vinton attended the board meeting and explained a proposal for repair and maintenance of the 50 year old Deal Elementary building. Karr's proposal includes power washing, tuckpointing damaged mortar joints, replacing 15 defective or missing units, re-laying 25 loose brick units, and provide repair/caulking around windows, expansion joints and doors. The board will investigate whether there are any other companies interested in bidding out the project, with intentions to sign a contract for the work next month.

Stoffers also said he's given the

SCHOOL BOARD STORY

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Class reunion proceeds to TRH assisted living fund

The combined CRHS Classes of 1953, 1954, 1955 and 1956 made a generous \$1,343 donation to the Thomas Rest Haven Assisted Living project. TRH Administrator Mary Jane Venteicher (second from left) accepts the check from Kay Dorpinghaus Anthofer (CRHS '56), Nancy Wallace Grettenberg (CRHS '55), and Betty Shirbroun Crees (CRHS '53). The money represented excess funds from joint class reunions over the past decade.

The assisted living capital campaign organizers announced this week that cash and pledges have surpassed the \$209,000 mark. Only \$81,000 more needs to be raised to reach the goal of \$290,000. When completed, the total of private funds raised will be \$800,000 which will be used to offset the expected cost of \$1.6-\$1.8 million for the assisted living facility.

Streetscape design meetings set here for Jan. 29-31

Even the casual observer may have noticed unusual activity in the downtown Coon Rapids area last week, with workmen surveying both Main Street and South Fifth Avenue areas, along with spray paint and colored flags marking many underground utility lines.

The work is part of a field survey to collect topographic data that will provide an adequate base map for engineers to use as they prepare design plans for the streetscape project currently under way. Elements in the base map include street, curb and gutter dimensions and underground facilities.

The Streetscape project is one of the Great places Initiatives. Last fall the Streetscape Committee chose the Kirkham Michael Engineering firm of Des Moines to assist in preparing a final design plan. That development process will include community participation in a series of meetings scheduled here over three days, January 29-31.

On Monday, Jan. 29, a design charrette (a creative, intense work session with the public) will be held throughout the day, during which different organizations and groups will be called to provide their specific input to help Kirkham Michael prepare a model plan. A similar meeting will be held Monday evening for the general public to offer similar input.

"Everyone who has specific ideas, suggestions, and concerns are encouraged to take part in this process," said Brad Honold, General Manager of CRMU who is heading up the local Streetscape Committee.

Kirkham Michael officials will spend most of Tuesday as a work day, using the input from Monday's sessions to come up with different design options and representations.

On Wednesday, another public meeting will be held to show the public what KM has designed, followed by further revisions. "By the end of the third day we hope to have a good feel

for what this community wants for its design," said Honold.

"The big challenge is having the city council be involved throughout the process to provide the best possible design within our community's financial constraints based on our limited resources," added Honold.

City officials committed \$150,000 of its TIF revenues towards streetscape. In addition, there's \$150,000 available from the Great Places' legislative appropriation. Additional funding sources include possible grants and future TIF revenues which the city council would have to commit. Streetscapping (programs to improve streetscape conditions) can include changes to the road cross section, traffic management, sidewalk conditions, landscaping, street furniture (utility poles, benches, garbage cans, etc.), building fronts and materials specifications.

